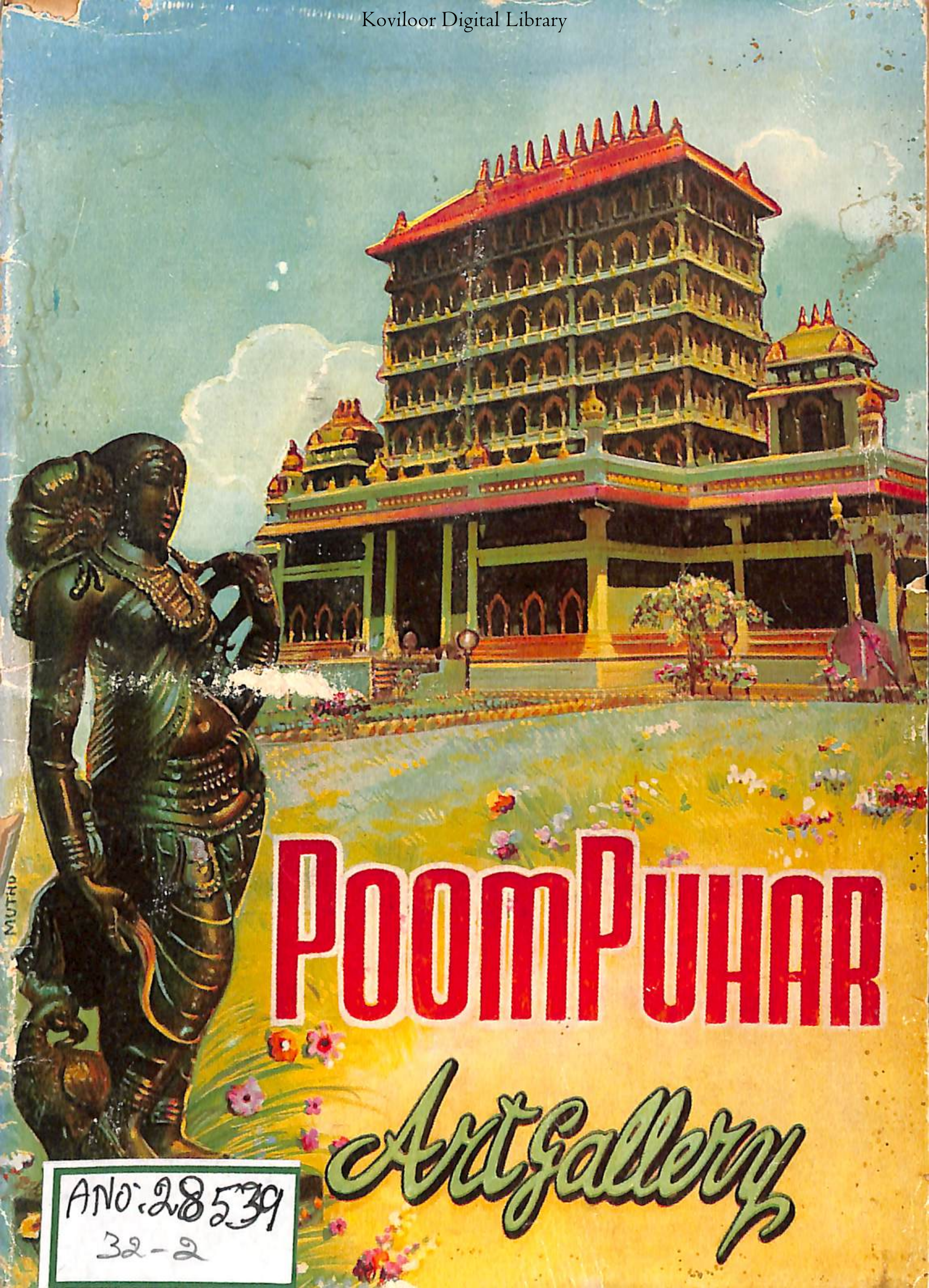


POOMPUHAR Art Gallery

POOMPUHAR ART GALLERY



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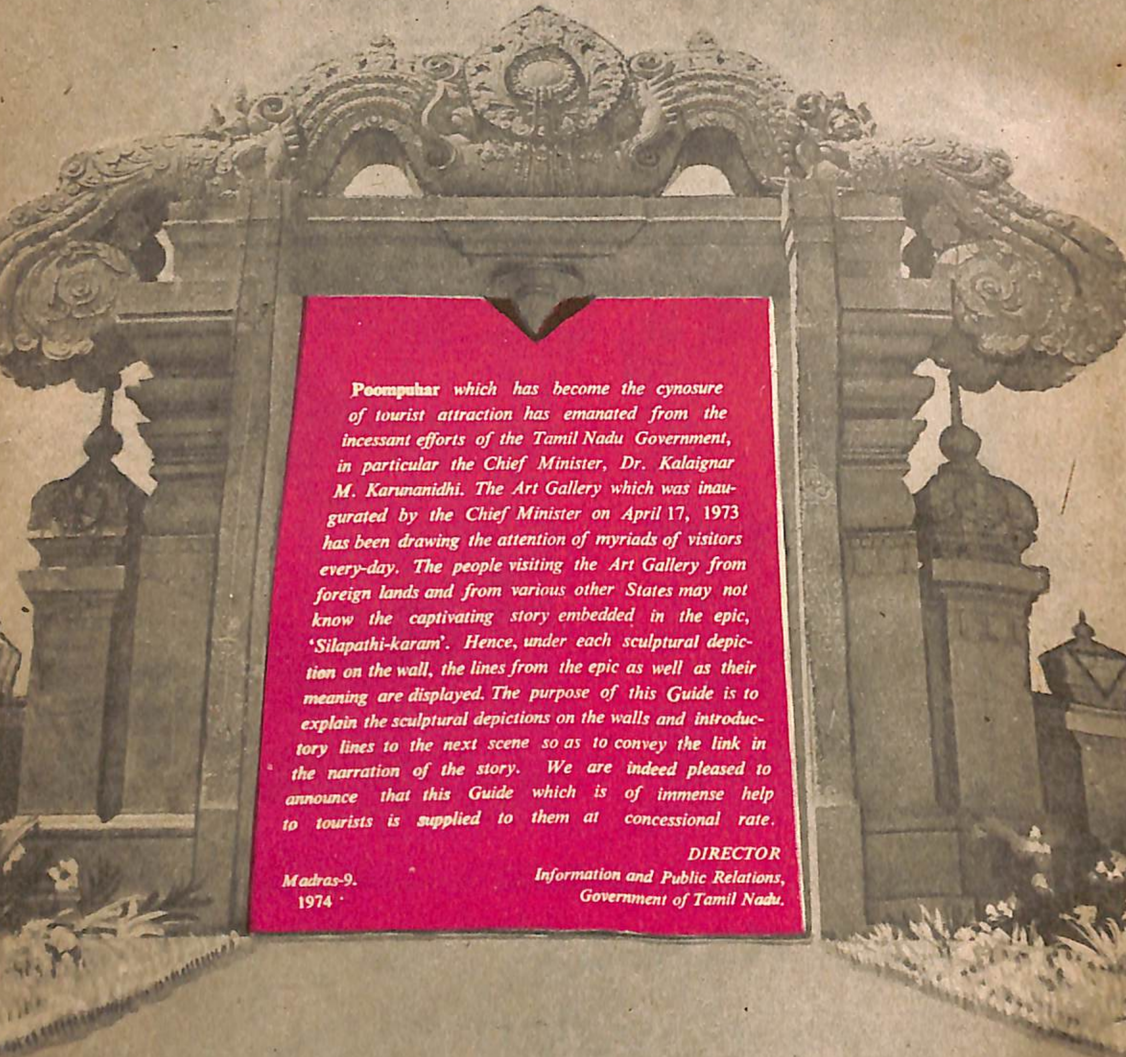
Government of Tamil Nadu



ILANGO ADIGAL



Kannagi
Kovalan
Bridal Pair



Poompuhar *which has become the cynosure of tourist attraction has emanated from the incessant efforts of the Tamil Nadu Government, in particular the Chief Minister, Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi. The Art Gallery which was inaugurated by the Chief Minister on April 17, 1973 has been drawing the attention of myriads of visitors every-day. The people visiting the Art Gallery from foreign lands and from various other States may not know the captivating story embedded in the epic, 'Silapathi-karam'. Hence, under each sculptural depiction on the wall, the lines from the epic as well as their meaning are displayed. The purpose of this Guide is to explain the sculptural depictions on the walls and introductory lines to the next scene so as to convey the link in the narration of the story. We are indeed pleased to announce that this Guide which is of immense help to tourists is supplied to them at concessional rate.*

DIRECTOR
Information and Public Relations,
Government of Tamil Nadu.

Madras-9.
1974

Price Rs. 2

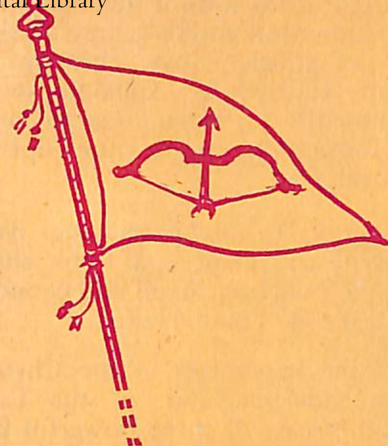
PROLOGUE

" All that is good in Art is the expression of one soul talking to another, and is precious according to the greatness of the soul that utters it."

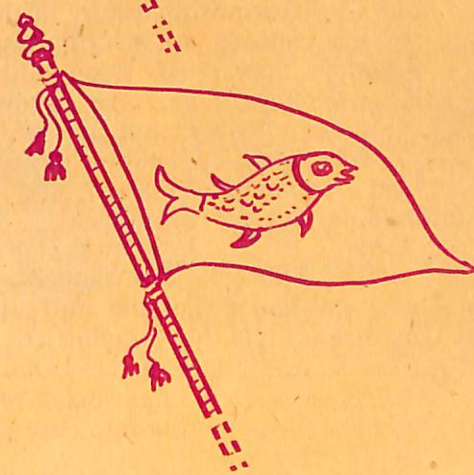
—RUSKIN.

The hidden life of ancient Tamils finds expression in all their literature. *Silappathikaram*, one of the five great epics of Tamil Literature is full of lyrical charm and is a model of ancient Tamil music and dramatic composition. The Tamils' love of personal freedom, their appreciation and responsiveness to nature, their reverence for woman hood and their mighty struggle for glory is a ruling motive in every noble life-all these things are profusely portrayed in ' *Silappathikaram*.'

The Sage Ilango wanted to illustrate that dharma will become the God of Death to kings who swerve from the path of righteousness, that great men should adore a chaste lady and that destiny will manifest itself and be fulfilled. Based on these three cardinal truths the poet begins his epic. The poet aims at truth but beauty breaks in. All art is the expression of life, in forms of truth and beauty. In 'Silappathikaram', the scholar Madalan stated that the song of Madhavi at the beach has caused the defeat of the Northern kings Kanaka and Vijaya whose crowned heads were cracked due to the weight of the stone carried by them for fashioning the image of Kannagi.







Ilango opens a door through which our imagination enters a new world, a world of music, love, beauty and heroism—the whole splendid world. Undoubtedly "*Silappathikaram*" is on equal footings with the other epics of the world.

In order to understand the lyrical legend of the great epic one should know the political, social and economic conditions of Tamil Nadu.

At the beginning of the Christian era, the ancient land of the Tamils was comprised of three powerful kingdoms the Chola, Pandya and Chera. *Poompuhar*, the city of abundant wealth and prosperity also known as *Kaveripoompattinam* was the capital of the Cholas; Madurai, a flourishing city of beautiful mansions was the seat of Government for the Pandyas and the glorious city of Vanji was the capital of the Cheras.

The Cauveri merging with the bellowing sea was known as *Puhar* but due to the exquisite beauty of the port town, it came to be called 'Poompuhar'. Another name of Poompuhar was *Kaveripoompattinam*, the greatness of the city is brought out in some of the poems in the Sangam literature and also by Silappathikaram and Manimekalai among the epics.

The Tamil Nadu Government is very particular that the ancient Tamil culture should be popularised; hence the life and time of the Tamil classic '*Silappathikaram*' has been recreated at *Poompuhar* to the immense pleasure of the Tamils.



Kaveripoompattinam consisted of three vast *Divisions* : the place near the sea shore was Maruvurpakkam and the main portion was known as Pattinapakam and market place in between Maruvurpakkam and Pattinapakam was Nalangadi (the daily market).

In Maruvurpakkam the sun shone over the open terraced mansions, the ware-houses near the harbours and over the turrets with air-holes looking like the eyes of deers. Near the delta of the Cauveri were seen the abodes of the Greeks and Romans whose prosperity was never on the wane. On the harbour were to be seen sailors from all over the world, but for all appearance they lived as one community. Ships from far off lands called at the port.



In the streets of the city, hawkers went about with paints, bathing powders and cool sandal pastes, flowers, incense and fragrant scents. In certain places weavers were seen dealing in fine fabrics made of silk, fur and cotton. There were streets full of silks, corals, sandals and myrrh besides a wealth of rare ornaments, perfect pearls, gems and gold.

There were also streets where grain-dealers lived and sold eighteen varieties of food-grains kept in separate heaps. Washermen, makers of muffins, wine-sellers, fishermen selling fish, dealers in white salt, petty-traders in betel leaves, scents, mutton-vendors, oil-mongers, dealers in bronze, manufacturers of copper, carpenters, and artisans like blacksmiths, sculptors, potters, golds-

miths, jewellers, tailors, cobblers, skilled workers of all sorts who made fancy trinkets of pieces of cloth and cork, great musicians well-versed in musical science had their respective localities.

Next was *Pattinapakkam* where the powerful Chola King's palace stood majestically. Poompuhar reached new pinnacle of glory under the magnificent reign of Karikala. His military prowess can be said to be the carving of the tiger emblem on the Himalayas and the consequent overthrowing of the Arya Monarchs of the North. On his return, the King of the great Vaccira-nadu gave him a pearl canopy as tribute while the King of Magadha presented him with an audience-hall. The King of Avanti handed over a tall and beautiful arch on the gateway and, with all these tributes was raised an artistic Hall much praised by greatmen as 'Pattimandapam', where learned men held healthy discourses.

Kaverippoompattinam was a busy international port and goods of foreign trade bore 'tigerseal'. Horses from foreign countries landed in the port and the Greek and other nationals brought their ships to buy pepper, akil, cloths, pearls and splendid gems. A Light House of excellent engineering skill beautified the port.

The Vellidai Manram (Hall) was an open space where bundles of goods were kept and if anybody was tempted to remove the goods, clandestinely, the invisible deity guarding the place would make the thief go round and round the open plain and would not



permit him to pass away from there. The very thought of stealing anything made people quake with fear.

The five illustrious institutions in Kaveripoompattinam were the Vellidai Manram, Ilanji Manram, the Nedunkal Ninra Manram, the Butha Square and the Pavai Manram.

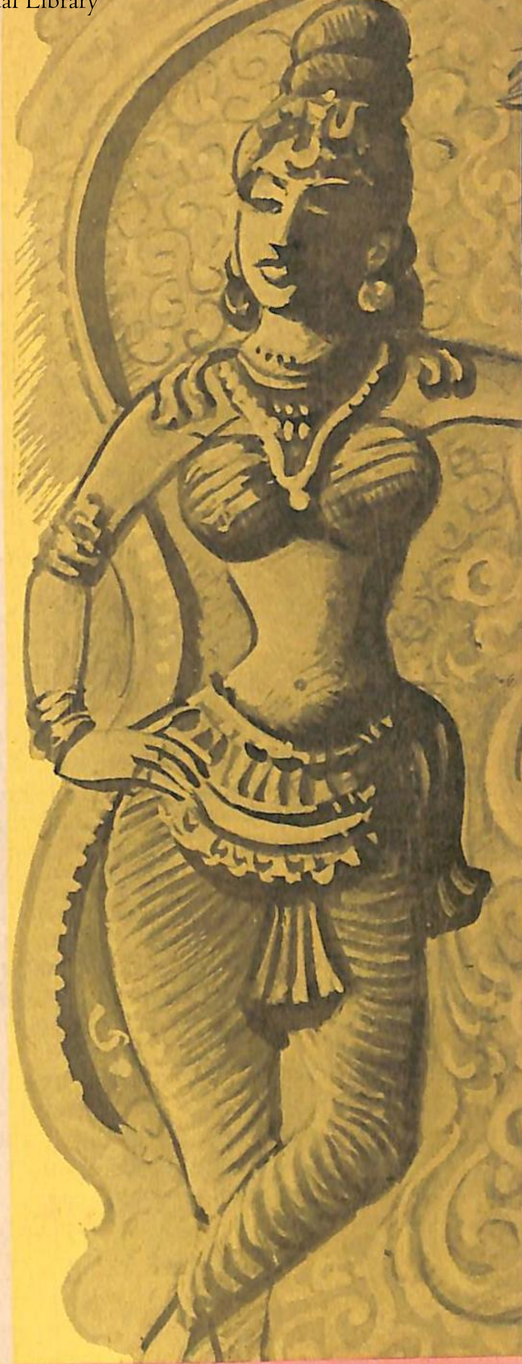
In the Ilanji Manram there was the miraculous lake, by bathing in and circumambulate, all hunchbacks and crippled, the dumb, deaf and lepers- were cured of their infirmities and gained health and grace of form.

By worshipping and going round the tall shining stone stood in the open space of Nedungal Ninra Manram, the mad will regain his senses, those bitten by poisonous snakes were cured and the evil spirits fled from the sufferers.

At the junction of four roads was the Butha Square where stood the Butha proclaiming, in a loud voice, that he would bind with his rope and devour the wicked who assumed the garb of asceticism to cover their sin and other such hypocrites.

The statue in the Pavai Manram (Hall) would never open its mouth but would weep by shedding tears on every occasion when there was a deviation from the path of justice by the King, or when partiality was shown in the court of justice by his wrong interpretation of the law.

Poompuhar was a cosmopolitan city and the Jains, Buddhists, Saivites and Vaishnavites lived in harmony. It is



indeed a great tragedy that Poompuhar with all its beauty and glory was devoured by the furious sea like the other great ports of Kapadapuram and Lemuriah.

It is but natural that man wants to recapture the ancient city washed away by the roaring sea. The Western countries endowed with monetary and scientific equipment are engaged in conducting deep-sea archaeological excavation to bring to the surface the lost glory of the cities. Tamil Nadu, with its limited resources is not in a position to undertake such costly excavation operation to unearth the buried glories of Poompuhar. But, the resourceful Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi has given a massive plan to recapitulate Poompuhar with all its pomp and pageantry of the ancient era on the soil where Kannagi lived, which could serve as a fitting memorial for that celestial lady of chastity. He has already written the story of Kannagi as a drama in lyric and popularised it in his film 'Poompuhar'. In order to immortalise the epic and consecrate the ideal womanhood he further desired that the scenes in *Silappathikaram* should be brought in stones in an Art Gallery. The Art Gallery, blossomed at Poompuhar, was conceived by his fertile mind and persistent efforts.

The Royal Cheran Senguttuvan immortalised Kannagi by raising a stone temple whereas his brother the sage Ilango perpetuated her memory perennially by his majestic poems. We see both the Royal and the Sage in Dr. Kalaignar Karunanidhi.



The Art Gallery is raised in the traditional style of Tamils in a seven-storied mansion. No where in India one can see such a model as in Poompuhar.

The Art Gallery covers 5,100 sq. ft. in an area of 2.16 acres near the seashore of Poompuhar. Our Chief Minister Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, laid the foundation stone for the building on 28.5.68 when he was the Minister in charge of Public Works. But, the work actually started only in October 1970 and on 17.4.1973 he opened the Art Gallery. About Rs. four lakhs have been spent for the Gallery and the entire sculputural forms have been made in the Government Sculputural Training Centre in Mahabalipuram.

The architectural structure of the Gallery consists of seven stories, the first storey is 12-feet high where-as the other flats are 5-feet high and the 'spire' of the top most floor is 8 feet in height. On the whole the Mansion is 50-feet high. In front of it is a massive gateway of 22.5 feet which is based on the architectural entrance found in a dilapidated condition in the temple of Mangala Devi in Surulimalai.

The lotus flower is highly celebrated in Tamil literature and it is splendidly and lavishly depicted in all carvings and paintings found in temples and artistic structures. In the Art Gallery here are about 20 lotus flowers painted on the ceiling. In the open space within the Art Gallery, a statue of Madhavi, 9 ft. in height weighing 2 tons, is erected besides a pool in the shape of



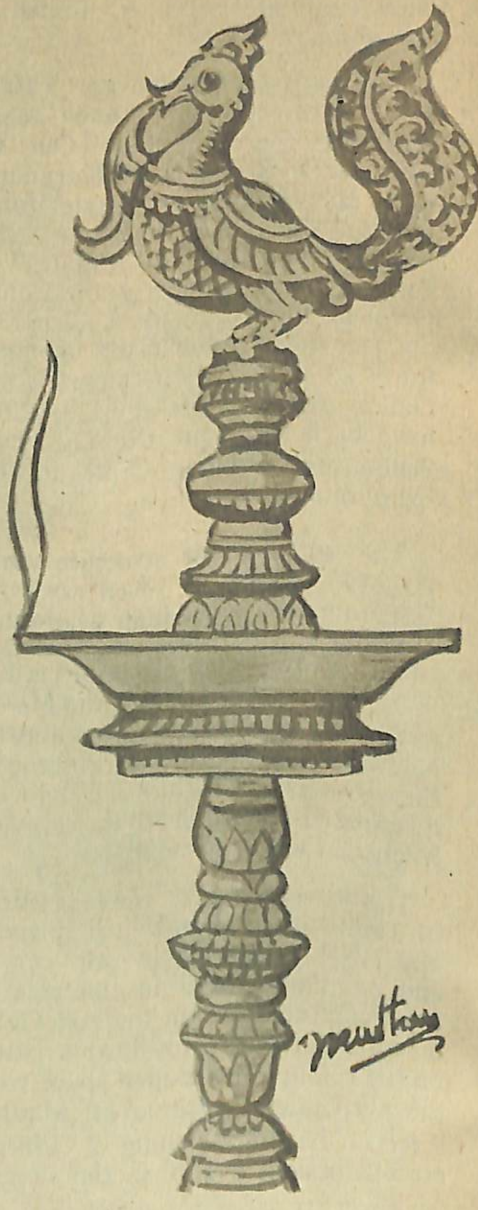
an anklet. The statue of the danseuse is made artistically in accordance with the lavish descriptive details given in the epic and even the minute ornaments said to be worn by the charming damsel is hewed deftly on the statue.

In order to conjure up the decorative ornamental scenic beauty of Poompuhar, the whole Art Gallery is made to present the environment and atmosphere of the 2nd century A.D. by the creation of the Ilanji Manram, Pavai Manram, etc., the Buddhist School, Arugan Kottam, Tirumal Kottam and Murugu Kottam.

The Anna Guest House on the eastern side of the Art Gallery serves as an attractive resting place for tourists.

Poompuhar has become a great attraction for all tourists and all foreign tourists visit Poompuhar next only to Mahabalipuram. The people of Tamil Nadu are indebted to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, for his titanic efforts to regain the glory of the past in this Art Gallery.

The dainty sculputural forms on the 49 Panels of the Art Gallery are so vividly presented that they seem to be lively and ready to converse with the tourists visiting them. Now let us proceed to hear the story, these beauteous forms are throbbing to whisper into our ears of the cultural and historical supremacy that they enjoyed and bequethed to the posterity of Tamils.



THE TALE IN BRIEF

The imperial Cholas whose reign in the 2nd century A.D. has been detailed by Foreign annalists like Ptolemy, had flourishing maritime trade relations with Far-East Asia, Greece and Rome. Their ships frequented Poompuhar, also known as Kaveripoompattinam, the shore capital of Cholas. It is also recorded in Tamil literature that the port of Puhar, as the international trading centre nurtured and promoted friendship and fratenity among all peoples. Masathuvan and Manaikan were merchant princes and Kovalan, the son of Masathuvan was married to Kannagi, the daughter of Manaikan. A separate mansion was set up for the young couple where they spent some time happily.

King Karikal Chola who constructed the Grand Anicut across the ferocious and benevolent river Cauvery when hydrology or the art of harnessing the unbridled rivers was unknown to the West, was a great patron of Fine Arts, particularly dance and architecture. At that time the air was laden with the glory and fame of the Nymph—like charming Madhavi, the court dancer and queen of artistes.

The hunch-backed lady brought the garland of pearls to hawk it in the street. This garland was presented to Madhavi by king Karikal Chola during her maiden dance performance. It was announced that Madhavi could marry the man who might offer to buy it. Kovalan, a handsome man and lover of arts offered the price and went with Madhavi to live in her mansion. Enthralled by the captivating beauty and inspiring artistic attainment of Madhavi, Kovalan was in high feather.

Indra Festival came ; it was an annual feature of joy celebrated at Poompuhar with pomp and pageantry. The port city was agog to celebrate the Festival. Madhavi and Kovalan erected an elegant settee on the mellowing sand to join the huge gathering. At the seashore Madhavi sang a song, the meaning of which gave Kovalan the impression that she had been harbouring the thoughts of another man. To hear her song, though mellifluous in tone, he was ill at ease. This song was the apple of discord between them, a turning point in his life and he left her with heavy heart.

Kovalan returned to his devoted wife, Kannagi who was an ardent observer of the rules laid down for chaste wives. Smitten by separation, she has been keeping vigil with bleary eyes to receive her beloved husband. Kovalan was all contrition and his penitent arrival was a great relief to Kannagi.

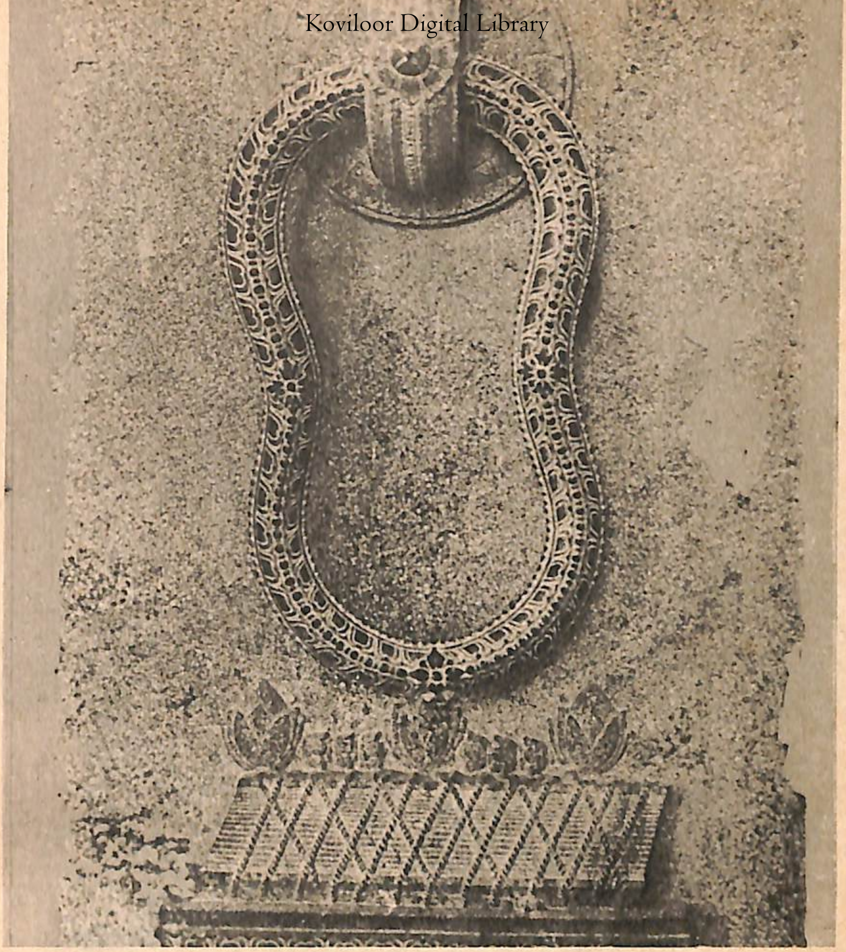
With Kannagi, Kovalan set out to Madurai with the intention of selling one of the anklets of his wife and regaining the wealth he lost after he strayed from her. They met Kounthi, the celebrated ascetic who volunteered to lead them to Madurai. On their journey to Madurai, Kovalan received a message from Madhavi which convinced him of the innocence of the latter. They reached the outskirts of Madurai and at the request of Kounthi, Mathari, a cowherd woman readily consented to accommodate them in her house. Nedunchezhian, the Pandya King who ruled the Kingdom from Madurai as his capital, was a great man of letters and he asseverated that justice would reign supreme in his land.

After a sumptuous meal, Kovalan took leave of his wife and proceeded to the Bazaar to sell one of the anklets. He met the Chief Goldsmith of the Palace and offered his anklet for a fair price. The Goldsmith who had stolen the queen's anklet sometime ago, thought it an opportunity to accuse Kovalan of the theft of Queen's anklet and make himself innocent. He took the anklet to the King and presented the case so eloquently that King Nedunchezhian, without bestowing a moment's thought on the matter ordered that innocent Kovalan be executed. The innocent look of Kovalan made the executioners hesitate to lay their arms on him. Yet the Chief Goldsmith prevailed upon them and, one of the executioners who was more crude and cruel in his outlook, mowed down Kovalan with one sweep of his sword.

The news of her husband's murder was a terrific shock to her. She rushed to the Court of the King, demanded justice at his hands. She pleaded with the King and to prove the innocence of her husband, Kannagi dashed on the floor one of her anklets. Rubies in blood-like colour splashed on the ground. The queen's anklets contained pearls and the King realised the injustice done to Kovalan; no interrogation was allowed nor was a personal inquiry held to enable Kovalan, the accused, to prove the treacherous plan of the Goldsmith to escape from King's wrath. The King fell down dead. Kannagi's wrath set fire to the whole city of Madurai.

Kannagi there-upon left Madurai and proceeded to Malainadu and reached Murugavel Kuntram, a sacred hill. She stood there under the shade of the Venkai tree and the inhabitants of the area, mostly Tribes stood spell-bound at the countenance of Kannagi. In the presence of these people, Kannagi left the place in a celestial chariot for Heaven.

The Tribes reported the matter to King Senguttuvan. He resolved to secure a block of stone from the Himalayas to carve the image of Kannagi and instal it in a fitting manner. After his success at battle fields in the north, King Senguttuvan made the captive Kings, Kanaka and Vijaya carry on their heads the stone from the Himalayas to Tamilnadu for building a temple for Kannagi. A temple was consecrated to Kannagi and was endowed for daily worship.



1. THE ANKLET AND THE LEAVES OF THE EPIC

Destiny predominantly manifested itself and wilfully fulfilled in the lives of Kovalan and Kannagi through an anklet of artistic beauty, the 'Silambu.' It seems that fate has conspired with villainy in their blossoming young lives. Ilango-Adigal declared to Chittalai Sattanar that he would write the tragic story in poetic form (Pattudai Cheyyul). This is the account of the origin of the great epic.

These lines are found in the 'Pathikam' poems in Silappathikaram.



2. 'ILANGO' IN THE EPIC (SILAMBU)

The illustrious Ilango-Adigal narrated the story in poetic form, which were heard by Kulavanikan Sattanar of Madurai.

Sattanar strongly felt that the biography of Kannagi, the Queen of Chastity, is an epic and only Ilango has the art and style to present it to posterity.



3. POOMPUHAR—MARUVURPAKKAM

Poompuhar—the harbour - capital city was divided into three major divisions :

1. Maruvurpakkam,
2. Pattinappakkam and
3. Nalangadi.

In Maruvurpakkam, the lower class of artists who excelled in several minor arts and crafts had their respective localities. They led flawless lives.



4. POOMPUHAR—PATTINAPPAKKAM

Pattinappakkam in Poompuhar was celebrated by the presence of highly renowned great men.

In an extensive open space, on the outskirts of the city, were quarters occupied by cavalrymen with swift horses, elephant warriors, charioteers with lofty chariots and infantrymen with fearsome looks.



5. POOMPUHAR—NALANGADI

The cool zephyr seeking sport in the pleasure garden of fragrant flowers, entered the ever-mirthful market-place (Nalangadi) and pervaded the streets of Puhar.

The Nalangadi is literally a day-market while the evening-market was known as Alangadi. They were busy centres of business.



6. KANNAGI—KOVALAN MARRIAGE ANNOUNCED

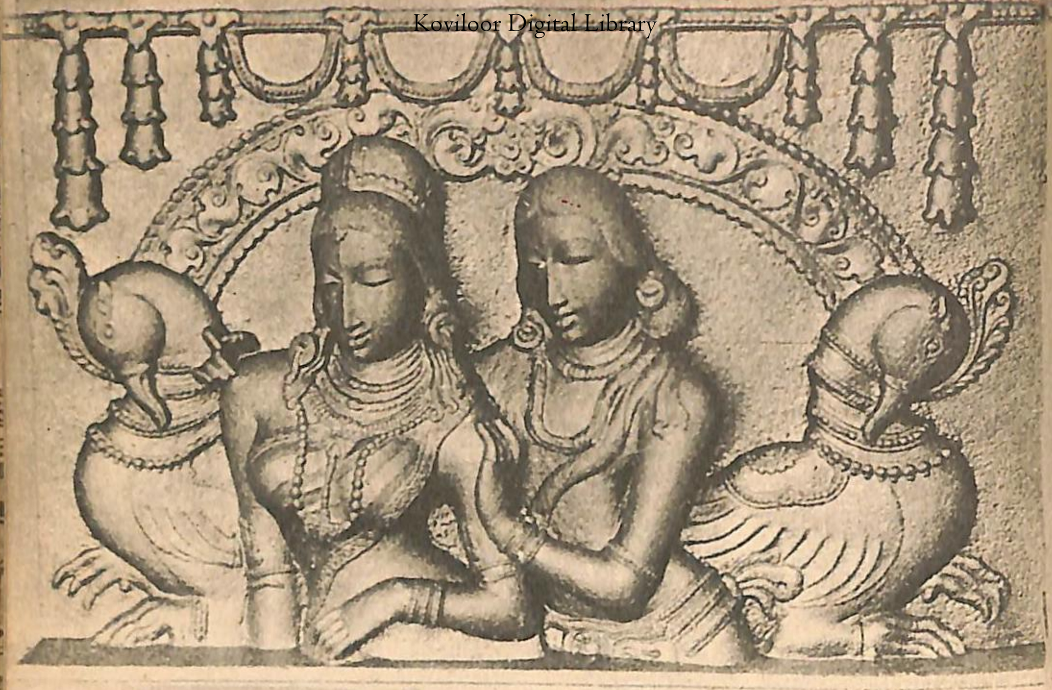
Kovalan was the son of the merchant-prince Masathuvan and Kannagi was the daughter of the celebrated sea-captain Manaikan.

Their worthy parents longed to see, on a happy day, as a bridal pair; happy in such thoughts, they sent forth fair maidens, seated on an elephant's neck, to invite, to the wedding, all those living in that great city.



7. BLESSINGS FOR THE BRIDAL PAIR

The tastefully decorated marriage pandal resembled the blue sky studded with twinkling silver stars. The Maidens who looked like moving golden creepers and whose hair was decked with scented flowers, showered blossoms on the bridal pair, saying: "May you live a flawless life, with a love that knows no separation, and held in close and unrelaxing embrace!"



8. KANNAGI AND KOVALAN IN THE MOON-LIT OPEN TERRACE

Kannagi and Kovalan entered their domestic life.

In the novel flat of their lofty mansion, they seated themselves on a gem-legged couch which looked as if it had been made for them by the celestial carpenter Valcon.



9. MADHAVI'S MAIDEN DANCE PERFORMANCE AND THE MAGNIFICIENT HONOUR OF TALAIKKOL

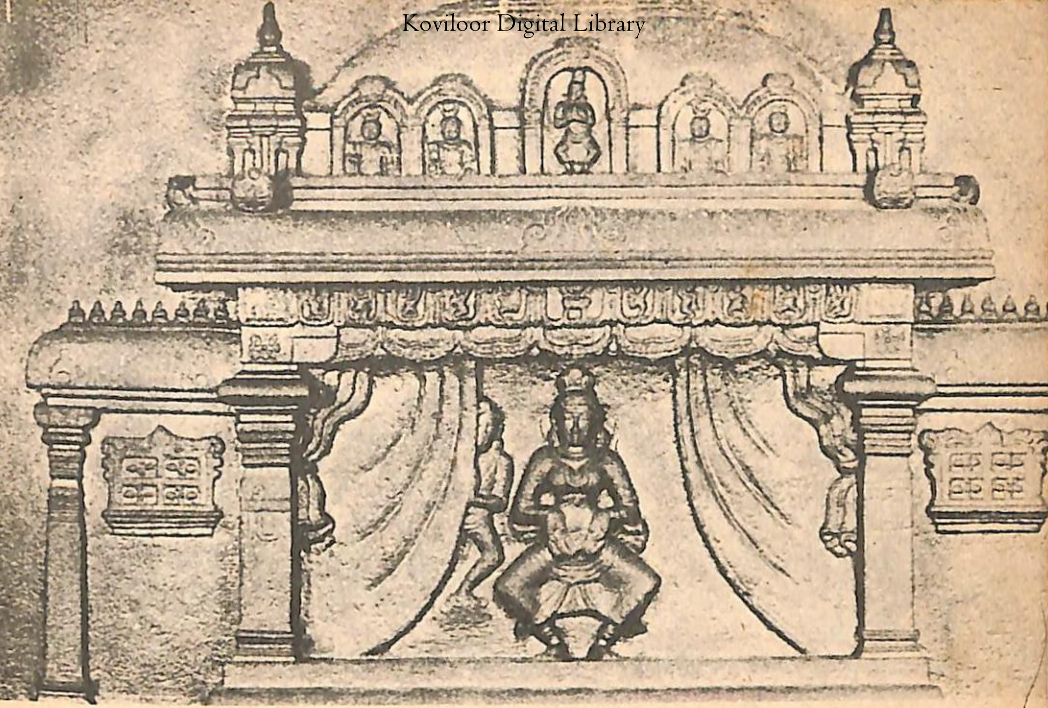
The Talaikkol or the staff, was the central shaft of a splendid white umbrella captured in the battle-field from monarchs of great repute. It was covered over by jambunatham, a kind of gold, its joints bedecked with nine gems. This shaft represented Jayantha, Indra's son, and as such was worshipped in the palace of the protecting King of the White Umbrella (the Chola).



10. THE GLORY OF TALAIKKOL

On the day when the Talaikkol was to be used by the dancing-girl, she had to bathe it with holy waters, bring in a golden pitcher, and afterwards to garland it. Then it was handed over with a blessing to the State elephant already adorned with a plate of gold and other ornaments on its forehead.

To the accompaniment of the drums proclaiming victory and other musical instruments, the king and his five groups of advisers were to circumambulate the chariot and the elephant and give the Talaikkol to the musician-poet on the top of the chariot. Then they went round the town in a procession, and entering the theatre they placed the Talaikkol in its appointed position.



11. MAIDEN DANCE PERFORMANCE OF MADHAVI

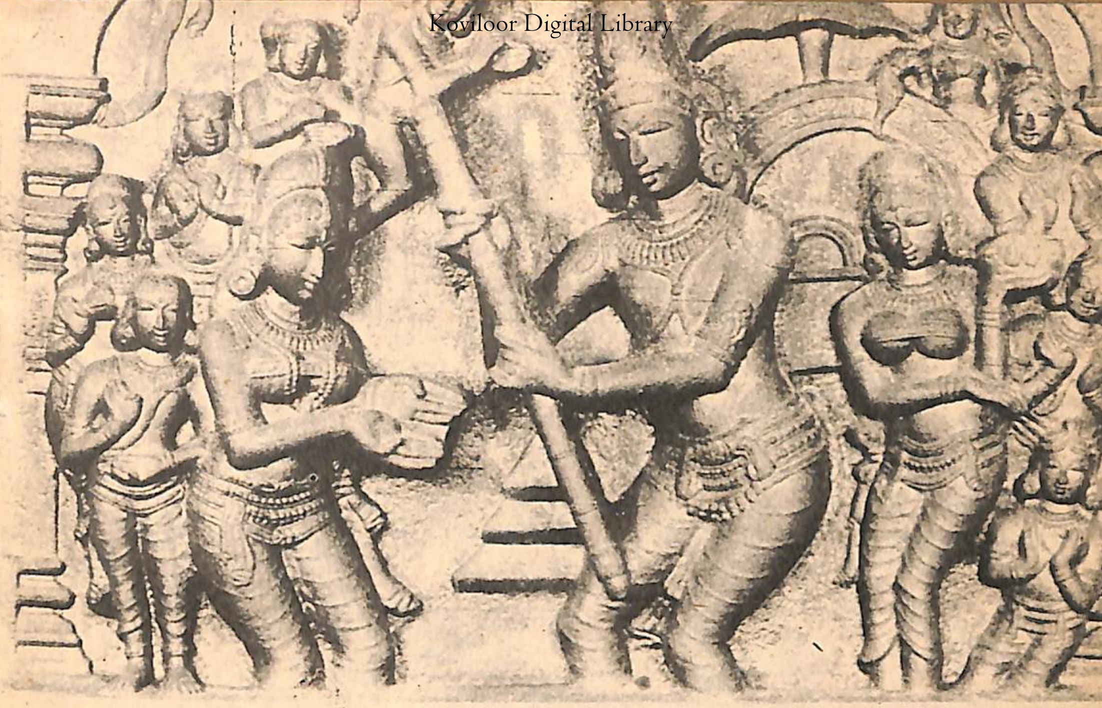
The stage in which the Arangetram of Madhavi took place, was chosen in accordance with the time honoured tradition and the horps set by the architects. The canopy was painted with many beautiful pictures, from which were hanging loosely garlands of pearl. It showed the novel and attractive appearance which the stage presented.



12. MADHAVI'S IMMACULATE PERFORMANCE

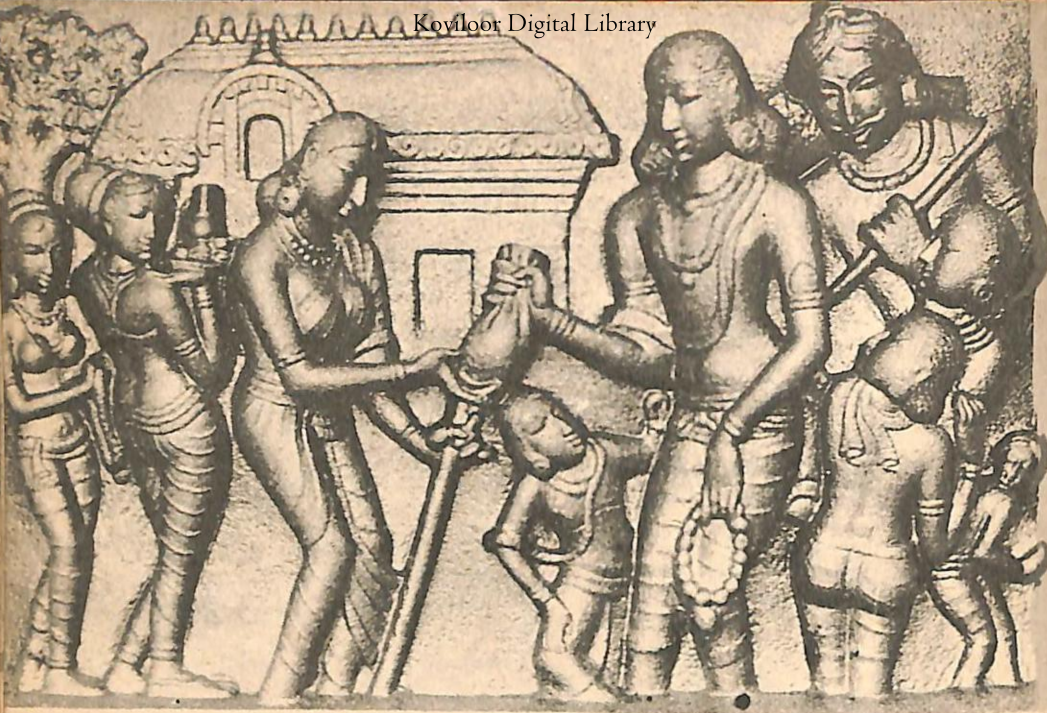
Madhavi was a superb exponent of the art of dancing. In her nimble movement she looked like a golden creeper animated with life. Her dance was perfect and impeccable.

In the Auditorium of Pearls, Madhavi's superb art kept the audience spell-bound.



13. THE KING'S GIFT TO MADHAVI

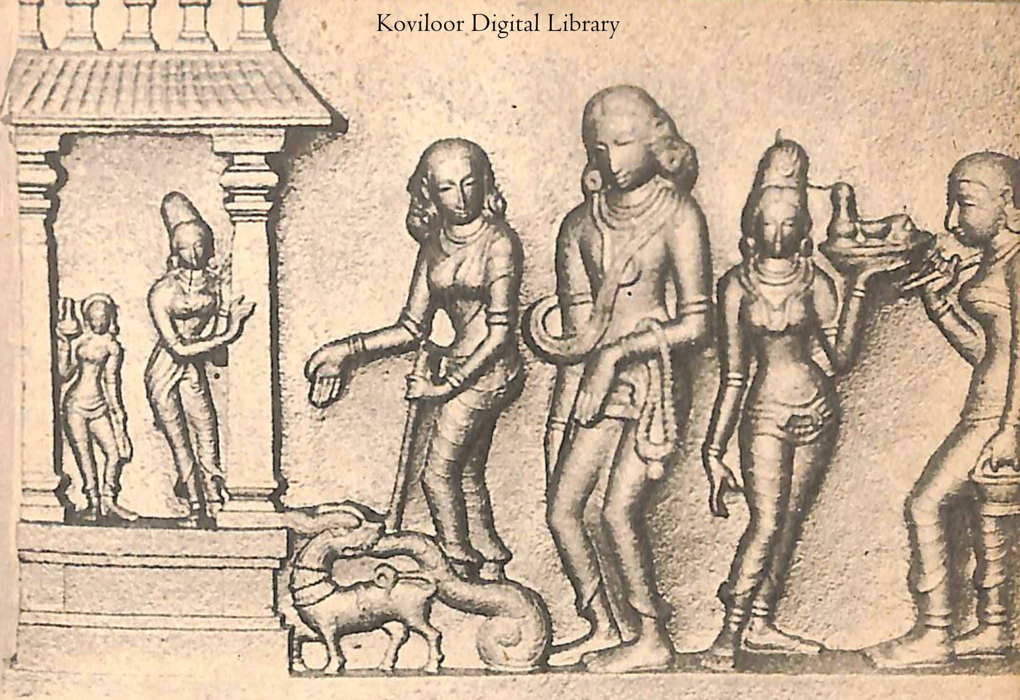
The king, in due recognition, of Madhavi's skill and dexterity in the art, presented her with a garland and one thousand and eight Kazhanjus of gold, which was the customary present given to dancers who held the Ta!aikkol and exhibited their talents for the first time.



14. KOVALAN BUYS THE GARLAND

Chitrapathi, the mother of Madhavi handed over the garland to a hunch-backed woman, asked her to stand out in the street and announce that "this garland is worth a sum of 1,008 Kazhanjus of gold. He who buys this garland becomes the husband of Madhavi."

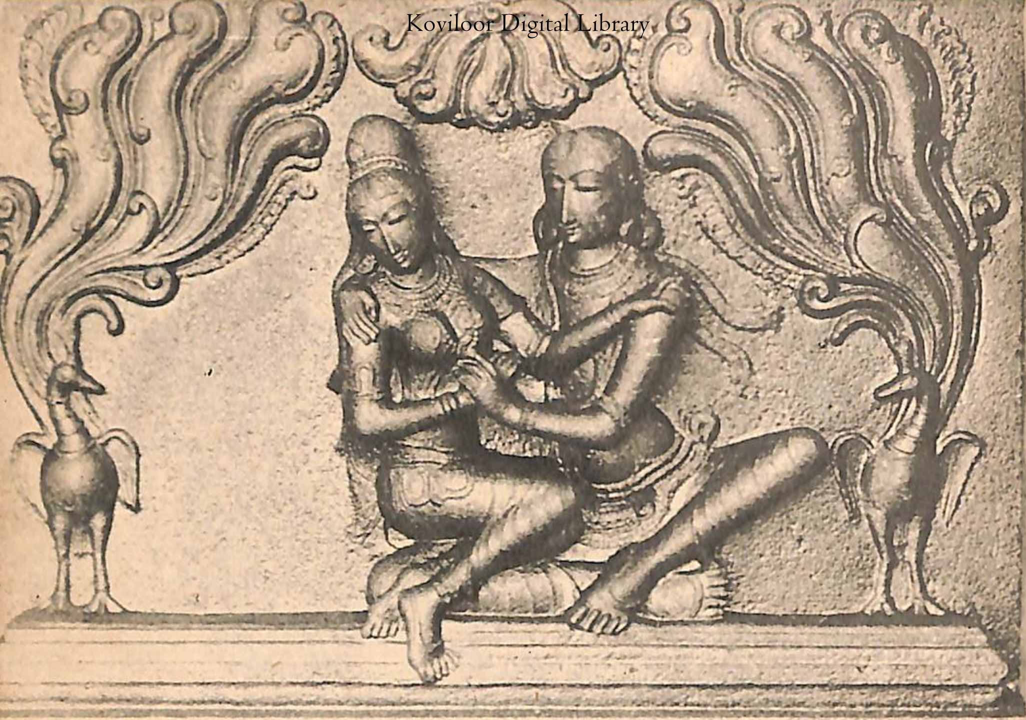
The garland representing the large lotus-eyed Madhavi was purchased by Kovalan and he accompanied the hunch-back to Madhavi's home.



15. KOVALAN ENTERS MADHAVI'S ABODE

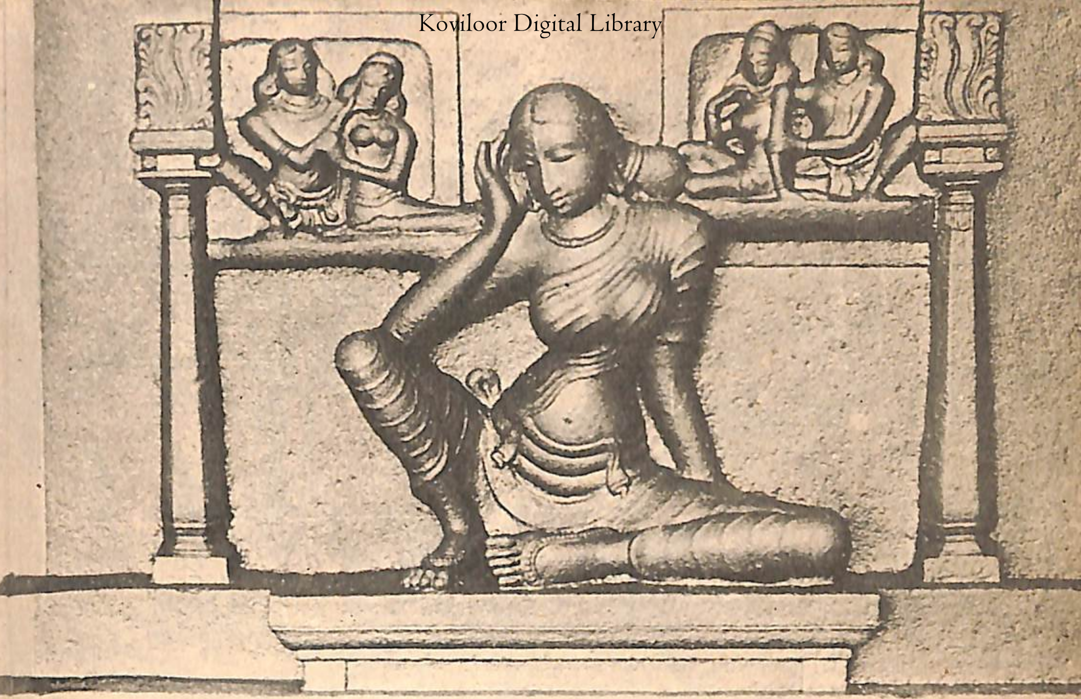
Madhavi's mansion was decorated with artistic beauty and Kovalan was overwhelmed by the opulence of the reception accorded to him.

Kovalan entered Madhavi's bridal chamber, and as he embraced her, he was captivated so much by her charm that he forgot himself and did not like to part from her, and became an inseparable partner.



16. KOVALAN—MADHAVI IN THE MOON-LIT TERRACE

Evening made his triumphant entry to the delight of the lovers. Kovalan and Madhavi were seated in the open moon-lit terrace. Madhavi, with a throbbing eager heart gave her love immense pleasure with intermittant bouderie (love's feigned wrangle.)



17. SORROWFUL KANNAGI, SAD AT HEART

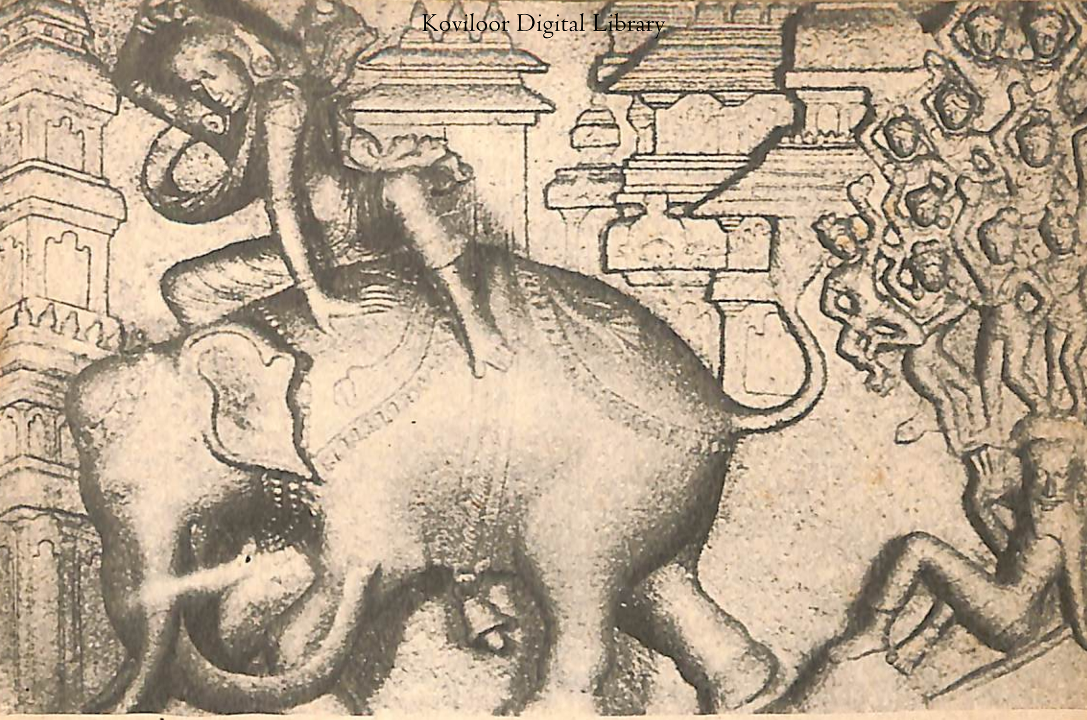
Kannagi separated from her beloved Kovalan was sad at heart and forgot to decorate herself. Neither was her dark lock softened by oil nor did the jewels adorn her hair. Lonely and filled with sorrowful thoughts of the moon-lit nights made her drop pearl-like tears.



18. CHRISTENING OF MANIMEKALAI

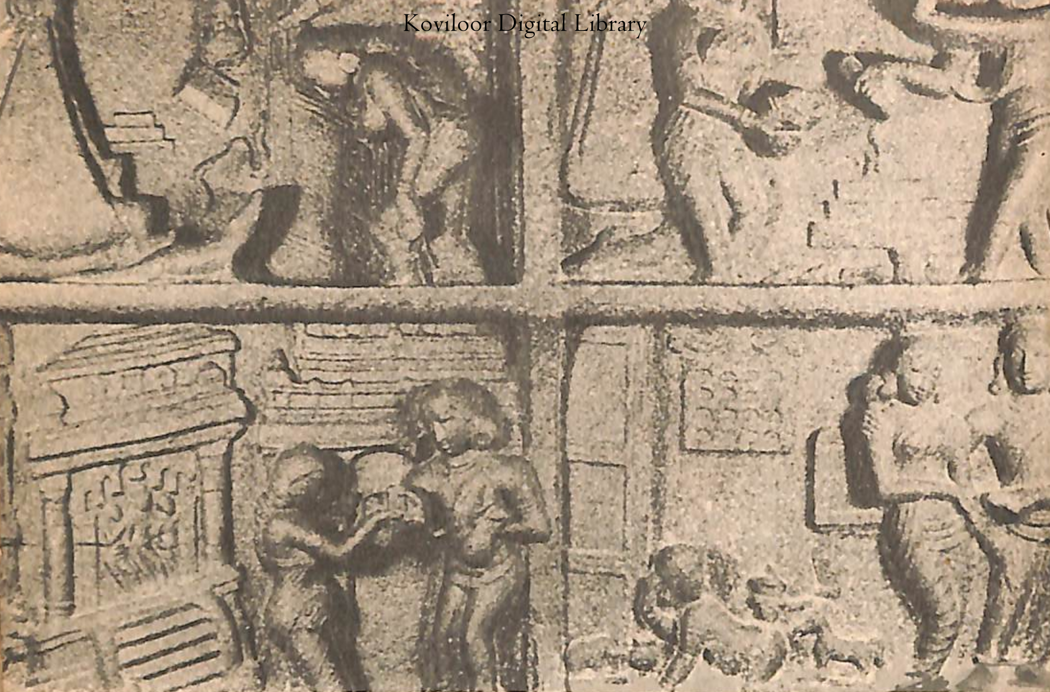
Kovalan and Madhavi celebrated the Christening of their beloved child. When the aged dancers desired that fitting name should be given to the child, Kovalan said :

" An ancester of mine had a misfortune of falling into the sea when the boat in which he travelled broke down. But he was saved by the Goddess Manimekalai who was our family deity. Hence my daughter should be named after my family deity." Then a thousand courtesans with jewelled girdles blessed the child with the name 'Manimekalai.' On that day Kovalan showered gifts of gold as liberally as the rain.



19. KOVALAN—A WARRIOR OF COMPASSION

On the occasion of the christening of Manimekalai, a Brahmin with bent body came feebly along with the aid of a stick in order to receive gifts. Seeing him in the clutches of an elephant which had run amuck Kovalan stepped forth instantly with a cry, and after rescuing that panick-stricken victim in the noose of the furious elephant and through a series of adroit and hazardous manoeuvres he controlled the elephant.



20. BENEVOLENT KOVALAN

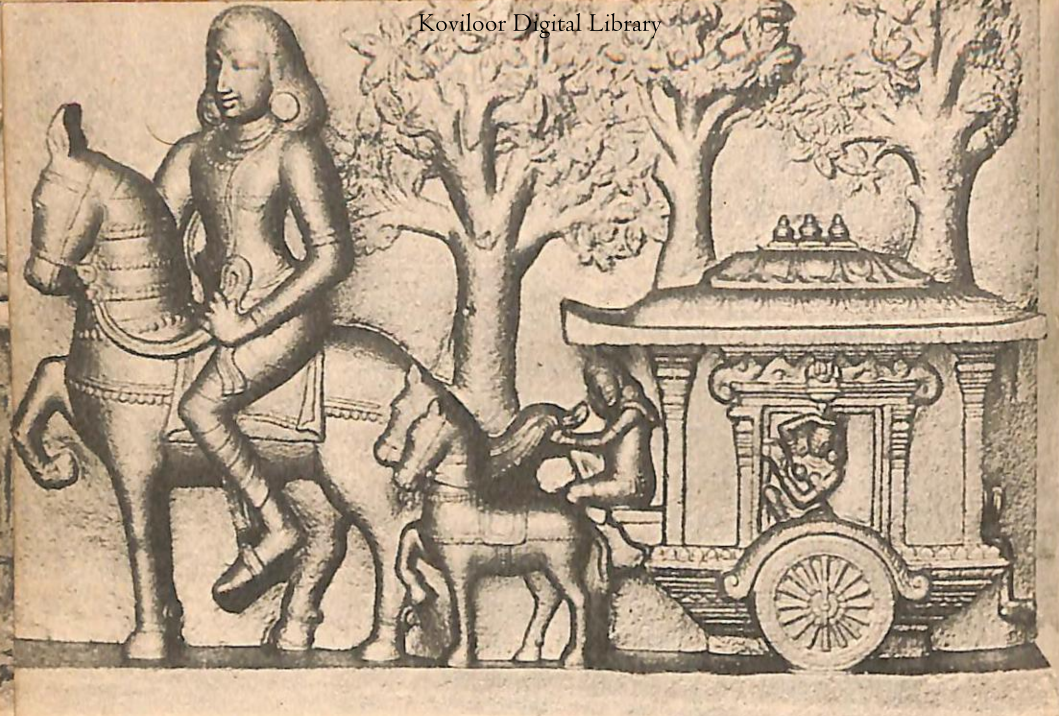
A Brahmin in Kaveripoompattinam left for the north abandoning his wife who had caused the death of his pet, a young mongoose. When she followed him, he handed her a note to be given to "people leading a virtuous life." She roamed about showing the note from house to house ; Kovalan received the note and said " Do not fret. I shall relieve you of your difficulty."

He made gifts in accordance with the instituted rules and relieved that lady of her worry. Then he made her husband who had left for forest live with her in the " right path " by giving copious wealth out of his limitless riches.



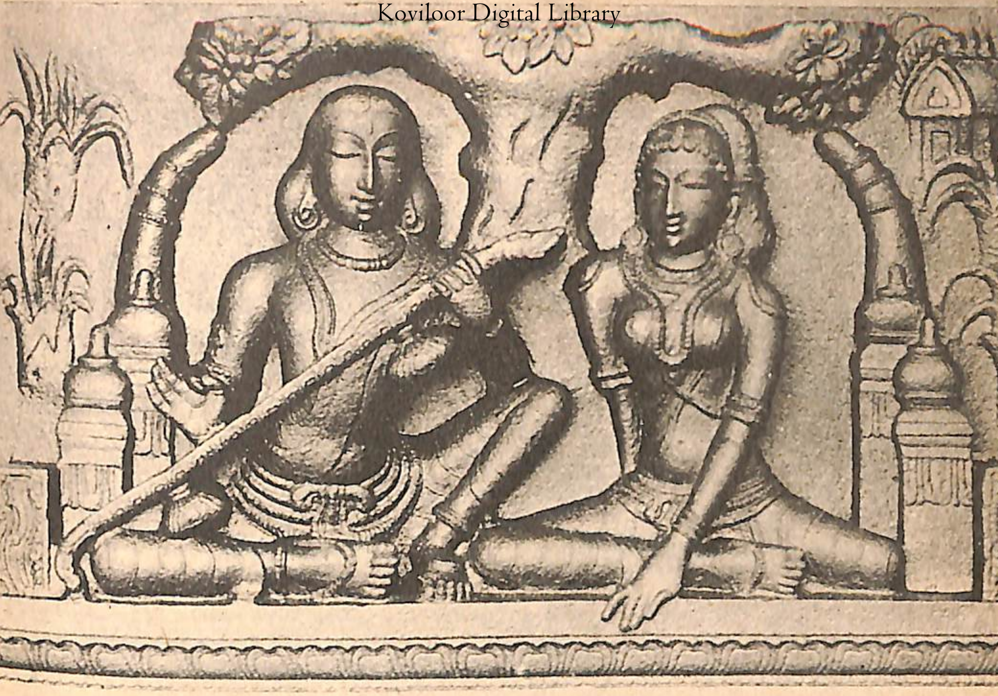
21. INDRA FESTIVAL IN POOMPUHAR

To the delight of the earth and the admiration of heaven, the festival of Indra was celebrated by the people of Puhar. One thousand and eight kings bore on their heads gold pots filled with cool and holy water, rendered fragrant by floating pollen of flowers of the Cauveri, taken from where it merges the sea, and performed the bathing ceremony of the Lord of Gods, Indra.



22. KOVALAN, MADHAVI—TOWARDS SEASHORE

People were rushing towards the sea to have a dip and to celebrate the festival of Indra. Madhavi saw the people hurrying to the beach in search of amusement and expressed her desire to go. Kovalan gave his consent. Madhavi adorned herself with exquisite and artistic jewels and Kovalan wore sparkling jewels on his garlanded chest and like a prodigal cloud, mounted his mule while the deer-eyed Madhavi got into her chariot.



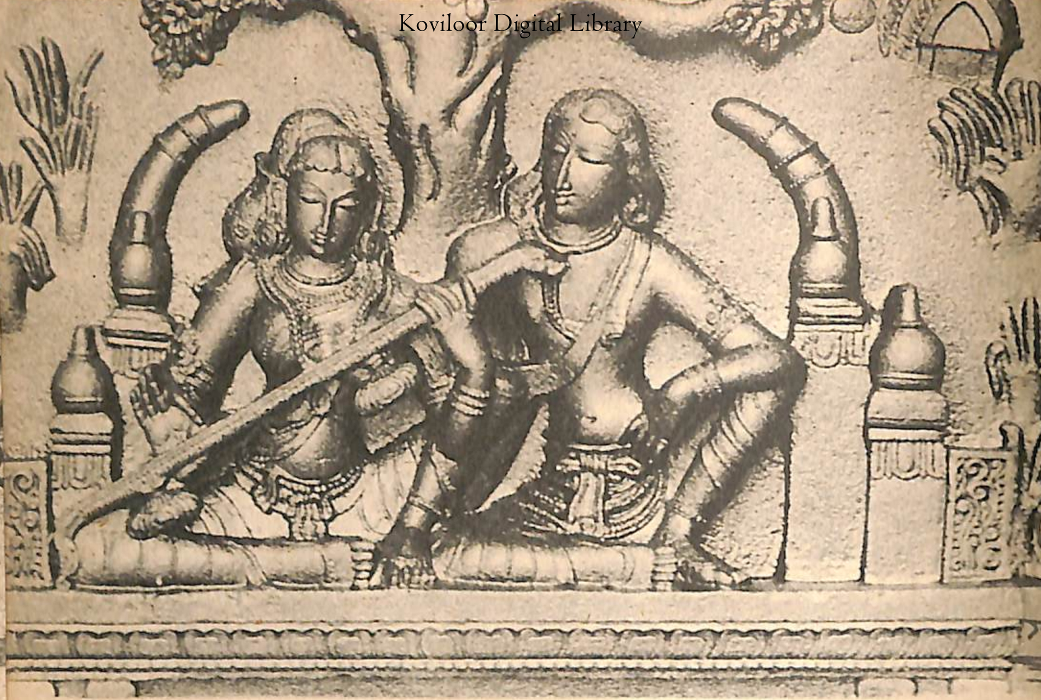
23. KOVALAN PLAYS THE HARP

There on a white-legged couch with a canopy of picturesque paintings, surrounded by a screen set on the newly-spread sands in the shade of the 'Punnai' tree standing in the wide expanse enclosed by the blossoming kaidai which swept away the foulness of the (fish-smelling) sea, Kovalan received the harp from Madhavi. He began playing odes to the Cauveri and songs appropriate to the seashore (Kanalvari).

"Hail to thee, Cauveri! Even if our Chola king, whose garlanded parasol is as white as the moon, extends his righteous sceptre far and weds Ganges, thou wilt not sulk. I have learnt, O fish-eyed one, that not sulking, even though he weds the Ganges, is the supreme virtue of chaste ladies. Hail to thee, Cauveri."

At that time Madhavi of the long beautiful eyes, who listened to the lyric (of Kovalan) felt that his song was indicative of a change of heart on his part.

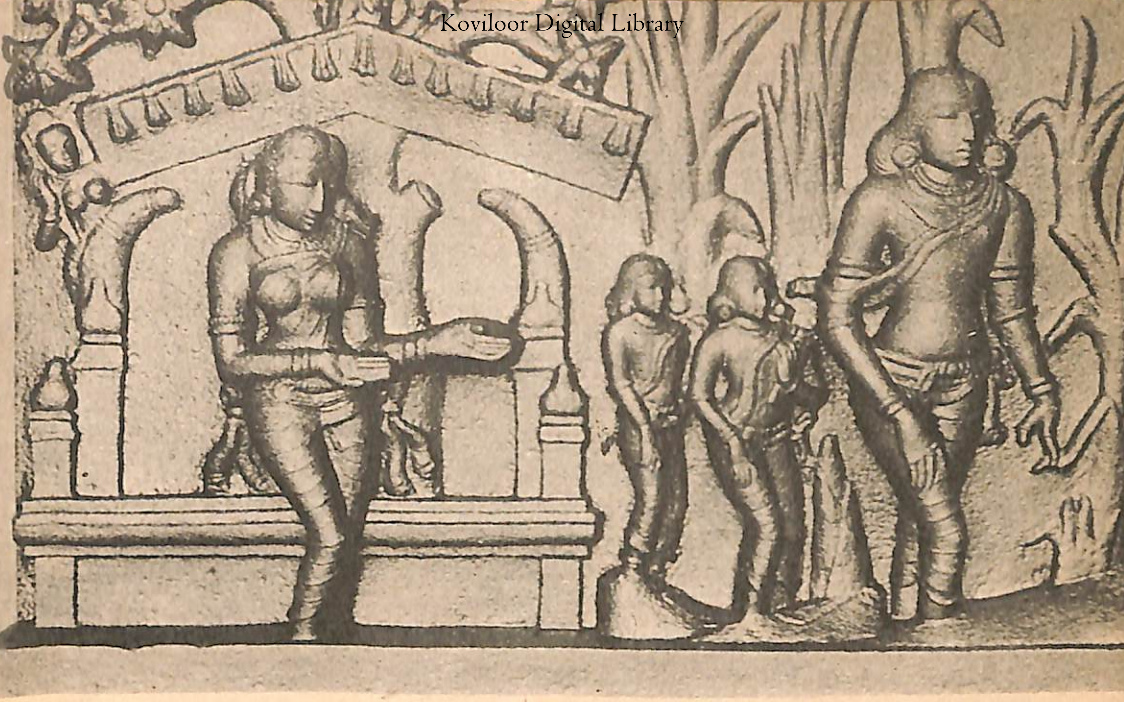




24. MADHAVI'S LYRIC

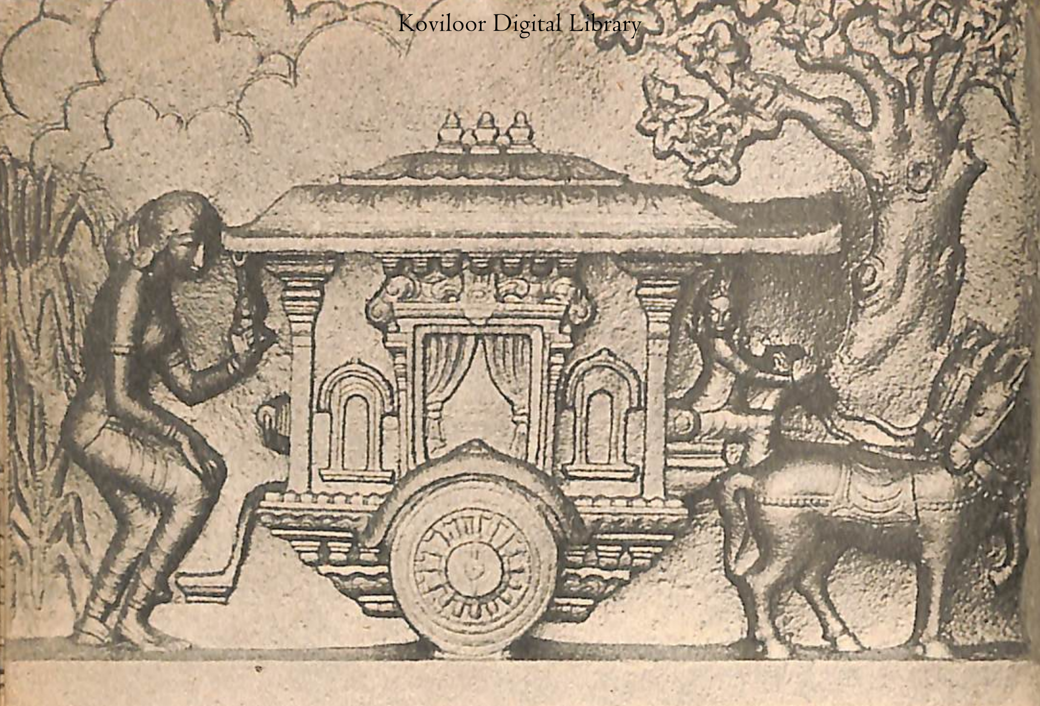
The zealous Madhavi received the harp from Kovalan pretending that she was pleased though (really) sulking. Then she began to play, purposefully an ode to the sea so fine that the goddess Earth wondered at her skill ; and all people were in ecstasy when they heard her sweet voice appropriately accompanying the notes of the harp.

The feigned quarrel of Madhavi sowed the seeds of suspicion in the mind of Kovalan.



25. SEPARATION OF KOVALAN

Kovalan thought that her song revealed her dubious character; he wrongly believed that she had somebody in her mind which made him wrathful. He said, 'I sang the Kanalvari; but she, the cunning one combining several deceitful lies, sang with her mind upon someone else.' Meanwhile the sun has sunk and daylight has faded. Goaded by indomitable Destiny which made the music of the Harp its pretext he gently withdrew his embracing hand from his fullmoon-faced consort. Kovalan leaving Madhavi alone went off with his retinue.



26. THE LONE RETURN OF MADHAVI

After Kovalan left her, Madhavi with a heavy-dazed heart returned home, without being consorted by her dear lover.



27. MADHAVI'S AGONY

Spring held sway over the fertile Tamil country and this filled Madhavi with the sorrow of separation. Taking the spotless harp in her grasp she began to sing a sweet song but fell into languor. Then she took up a garland formed by tying together with fragrant roots and flowers and choice petals of the red lily interwined with the white bent flowers of the ripe screw pine. On this she wrote a letter to Kovalan under the influence of Cupid who, single-handed, exercised his righteous sceptre over the vast world with his flower arrows. She took in her hand the long stalk of a flower and dipping it in the writing paste made of red lac and agar she wrote the letter.

She then called her maid Vasanthamalai on that pensive evening and asked her to inform Kovalan of all that had been written in the epistle and to bring him back to her.



28 KOVALAN'S REPLY TO MADHAVI'S LETTER

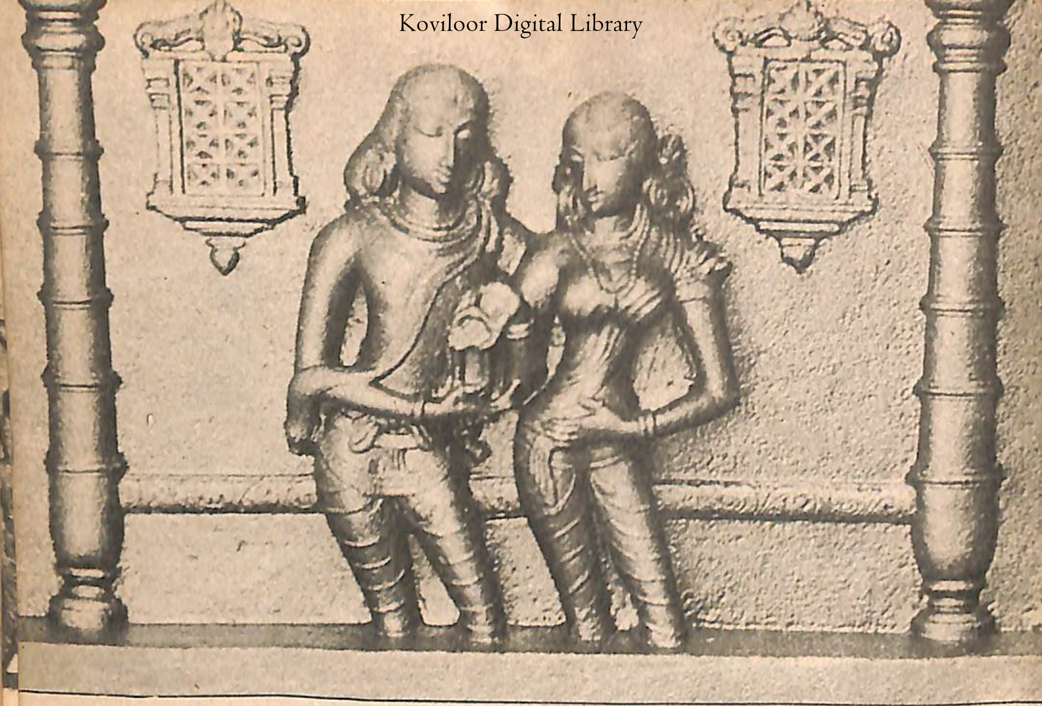
With the epistle, Vasanthamalai of the lance-like long eyes went to Kovalan, living in the quarter where grain was stored, and handed it over to him.



29. KANNAGI AND DEVANTHI

Kannagi narrated an evil dream she had in the previous night to her friend Devanthi who said " if you wish to wipe off the evil, go to the confluence of Cauveri and the roaring sea. There is a park where the neydal field opens its petals and where two sacred tanks are dedicated to the Sun and the Moon respectively. Those women who bathe in them and worship the God of Love enshrined there, will ever enjoy the company of their husbands in the world."

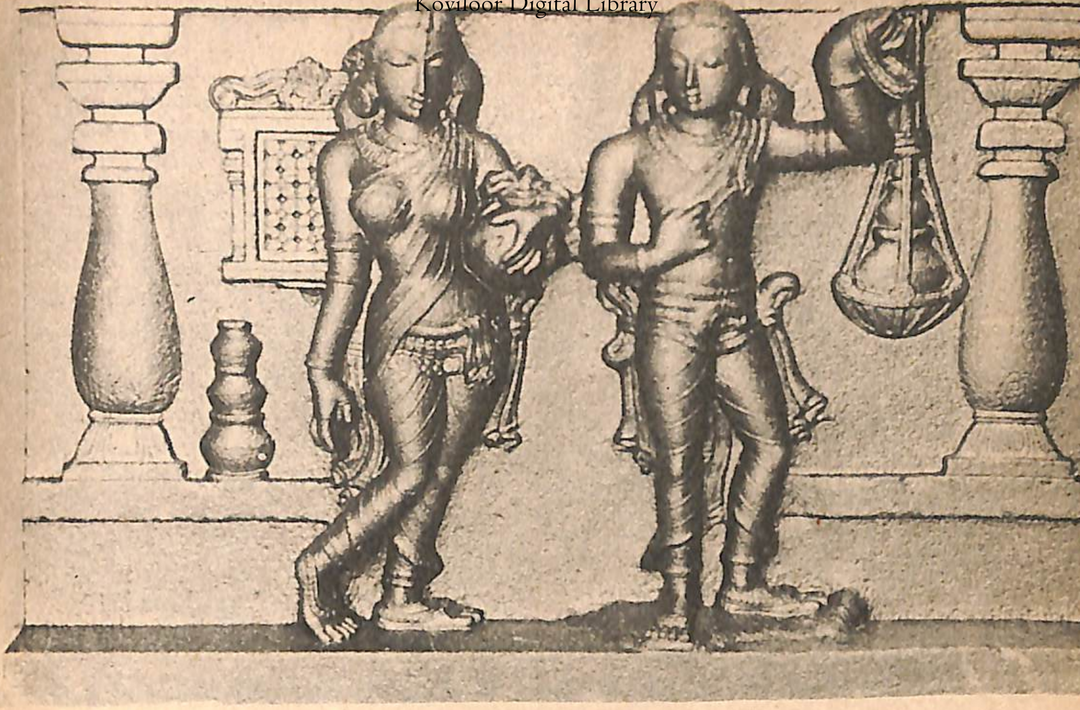
But the be-jewelled Kannagi said in reply to the charming lady, " that does not become of me."



30. KOVALAN IN KANNAGI'S HOUSE

While Kannagi and Devanthi were conversing, Kovalan entered the house. He was smitten with grief at the sight of the pale Kannagi, his fair wife and said " By consorting with a delilah (false woman) who makes every false thing appear like truth, I have lost the rich store of my ancestral wealth. O, the poverty I have caused (to our house) makes me ashamed of myself."

Comforting him with a fascinating smile on her brightening face Kannagi replied, ' O, do not grieve ! You yet have my anklets. Accept them.' She was under the impression that he had come to get money for his love Madhavi.



31. JOURNEY TO MADURAI

As soon as Kannagi afforded her Anklets Kovalan replied to his dame, " O my good girl, listen. I will use this anklet as my capital to recover all the jewels and all my wealth I have lost. Rise up, O lady with the stresses decorated with choice flowers ! Come with me to the city of Madurai, highly renowned for its towers !"

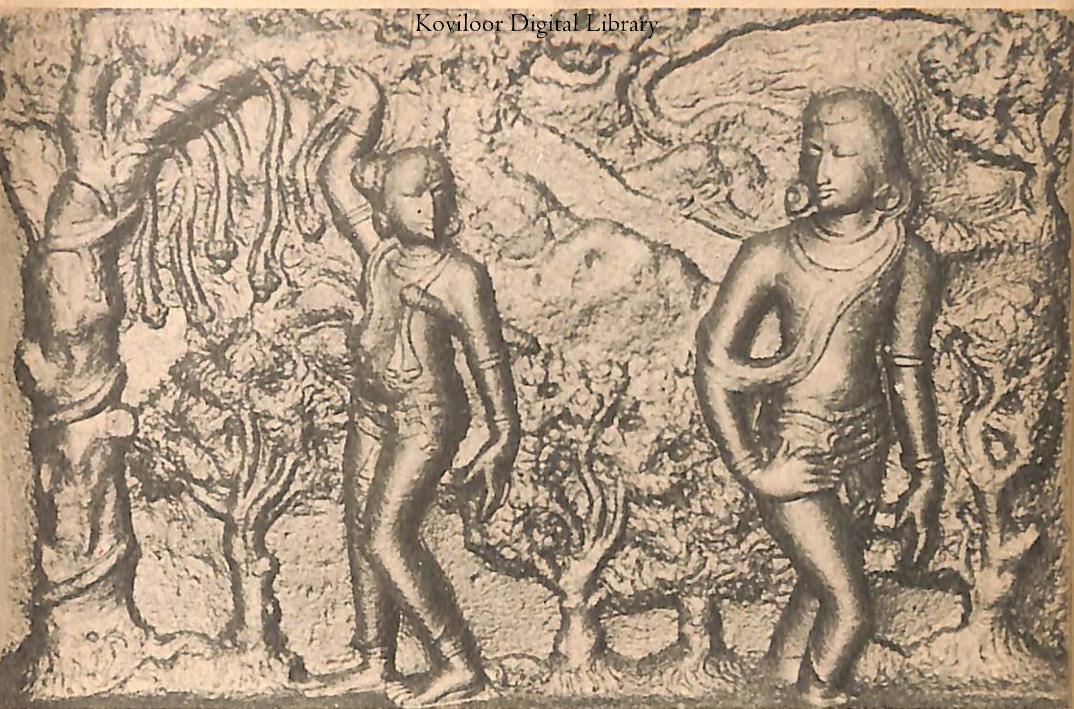
Impelled by Destiny he decided to start before the heavy darkness of the night was dispelled by the Sun.



32. SAINT KOUNTHI GUIDES THEM

Kovalan and Kannagi passed out of their outer gate and worshipped in the temples. They reached the cottage of Kounthi, a Jain nun, and prostrated themselves before her.

Kovalan told the nun that he was going to Madurai to make a fortune. The venerable Kounthi took up her sacred begging-bowl and her netted bag suspended from her shoulders. Holding a peacock's feathers in her hand and praying that the Panchamantra might be their guide on the way, Kounthi, unrivalled in the practice of virtue, accompanied the other two in their journey.



33. KAUSIKAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH KOVALAN

Kovalan lodged the holy saint and his loving wife in a harmless place and passed along a great road in search of water. Owing to grief and tiresome long journey, Kovalan's altered form was not recognised by Kausikan at once. To make sure he addressed the green-leaved Madhavi plant and said that the plant shed all its flowers like Madhavi who has fallen into deep affliation unable to bear Kovalan's separation from her. The moment he heard the messenger uttering the name of Madhavi he begged his pardon. He learnt the sorrows of Madhavi as well as his parents. Then in a reminiscent mood he realised that Madhavi was not at fault and that he was to be blamed.

Then he resumed his journey.



34. KOVALAN IN THE COMPANY OF TROUBADOURS

Kovalan loved music so intensely that even in this grief - striken mood, he joined the company of troubadours who were singing the goddess Durga's valorous dance. He took up the harp, a kind of lyre and played on it according to the well-established scientific conventions of music.

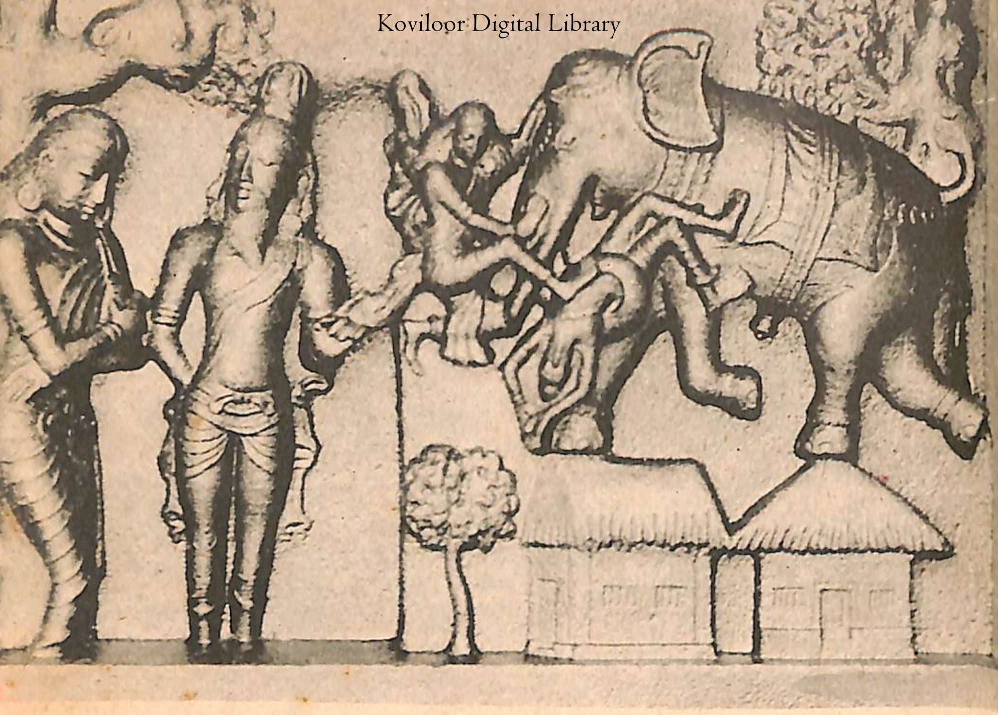




35. THE RIVER VAIGAI

The divine damsel, by name Vaigai, who is ever in the tongues of the poets, belonged to the Pandyas (one of the crowned kings of Tamil Nadu). Kovalan and Kannagi praised its charm affluently saying, " O this is no stream of waters, but a stream of flowers."

They crossed over the river on a raft, accompanied by the Saint to a fragrant grove full of beauteous flowers on the southern bank.



36. MADALAN REMINDS KOVALAN OF HIS PAST GLORY

While Kovalan was narrating to the sage Kounthi undiminishing prosperity of Madurai and the prowess of the Pandya king there appeared Madalan, a learned man and a native of Puhar who has returned from his pilgrimage. Madalan learnt the tragic episodes of Kovalan's life which reminded him of his past acts of valour and sympathy.



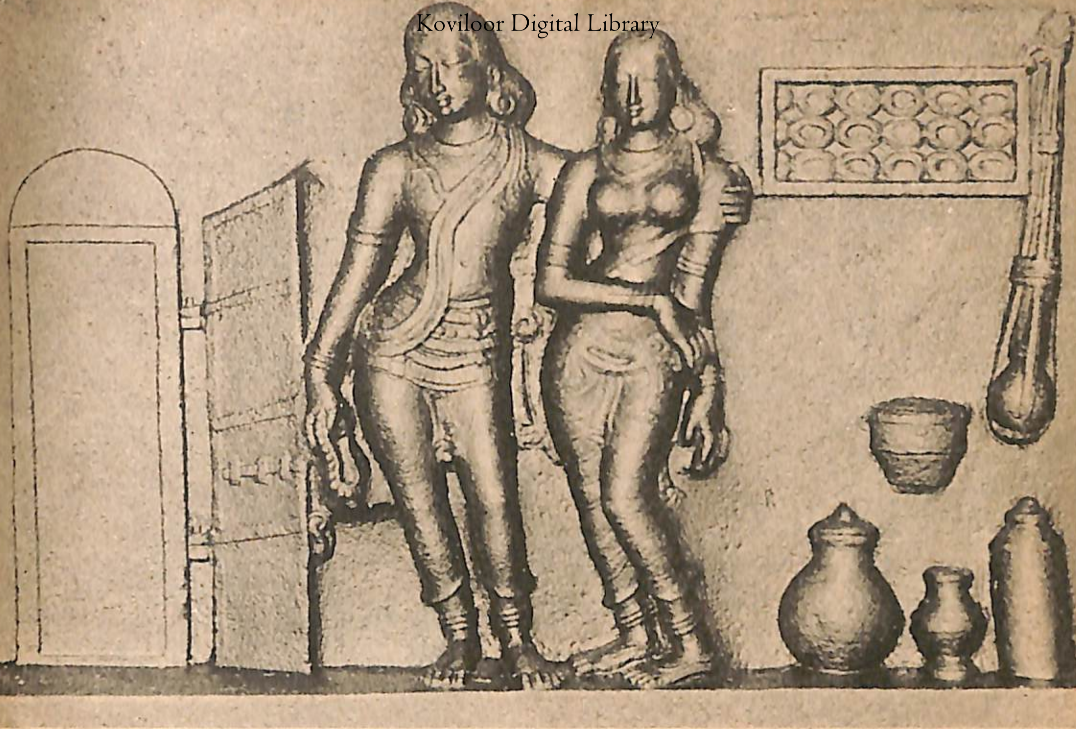
37. KOVALAN—KANNAGI AS MATHARI'S GUESTS

When Saint Kounthi observed that Kovalan and Kannagi should leave the out-skirts and enter the city of Madurai, Mathari, an old woman of the cowherd caste and also a devotee of Kounthi came and prostrated herself before the Jain nun. The Saint introduced Kovalan and Kannagi to Mathari and explained to her about the reputation of the illustrious families of Kovalan and Kannagi and requested her to lodge them under her safe custody. Mathari, glad at heart, took them to her house.



38. SUMPTUOUS MEAL SERVED BY KANNAGI

Kannagi with the aid of the fire of straw lit by Aiyai (Daughter of Mathari) cooked, to the best of her ability, for her husband. When that lord had seated himself on a small mat dexterously made from the white leaves of the Palmyra tree by a trained maid with her flower-like hands she sprinkled water from an earthern-pot over the feet of her lord. She spread a tender plaintain leaf and served food and said " Here is food, O, Lord! Please eat!"



39. THE FINAL FAREWELL

After his sumptuous dinner Kovalan drew his darling nearer and expressed his sorrow ruefully for his past licentious life. Kannagi consoled her wailing husband by saying that she was ever an infallible wife and it was her bounden duty to obey his commands implicitly. He said, "I shall go with one of the anklets that adorn thy beautiful feet and return after exchanging it for money. Till then do not lose heart."



40. KOVALAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOLDSMITH

Kovalan reached the bazaar and there he saw a goldsmith who, with a coat on, was walking at some distance, pincers in hand, followed by a hundred goldsmiths. Thinking within himself that this must be the Chief goldsmith of the much celebrated Pandyan, Kovalan asked him whether he could estimate the price of the anklet, suitable for the Queen of the benevolent king.





41. KOVALAN, SLAIN

Kovalan who came to sell his wife's anklet was accused of stealing the anklet of the great queen. The King held no enquiry but ordered to kill the innocent Kovalan. At this, an unlettered person, in a fit of drunkenness, hurled his well-polished sword from sih hand (upon Kovalan) cutting him across. The blood that gushed forth from the wound spread over Mother Earth who felt extreme agony. Vanguished by pre-destined fate, Kovalan fell, causing the Pandyan sceptre to bend which denoted the injustice done to Kovalan.



42. KANNAGI IN PANDYA COURT

When Kannagi heard about the death of Kovalan, she sprang up in rage and then fell down on the earth as if the rising moon had fallen with the clouds on the wide earth. Filled with ire, she hurried to the Court of Pandyan Nedunchezhian to indicate her husband's innocence. She addressed with a vehemence, " O Lord of Korkai, you have fallen from your righteous course ! My golden anklet contains gems inside."

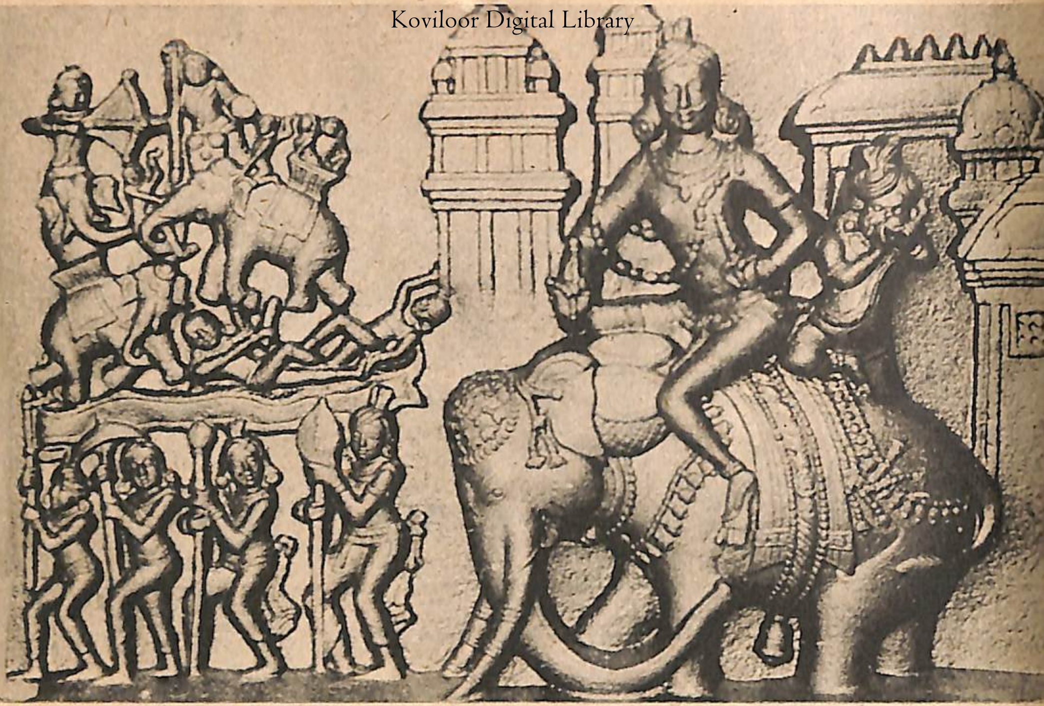
The King said, " Our Anklet contains pearls inside." Kannagi dashed her beautiful anklet on the ground and a gem flew into the King's face. When he saw the gem he said " Am I a ruler ; I listened to the words of a goldsmith ? It is I who am the thief." The King with his umbrella falling and his sceptre faltering, fell down dead. His queen collapsed saying " it is impossible for a woman to replace the loss of a husband."



43. THE TRIBALS BEFORE SENGUTTUVAN AT THE BANK OF PERIYAR

Senguttuvan, the King of the Chera Country and brother of Ilango, desired to feast his eyes with the emeraldine scenic beauty of the blue mountains, reached the river Periyar. He was accompanied by his queen Venmal, sage Ilango and the celebrated Poet Seethalai Sattanar. The tribals of the mountain, awaited the arrival of the great monarch with rare gifts and narrated to him their amazing experience of how a lady with a face agonising — a heart pining and breast lost, stood under a Vengai tree. Before their very eyes they saw her emplanning, celebrated by the celestials.

Thereupon the poet Sattanar who stood beside the king portrayed the tragic story of Kannagi.



44. TRUMPETING OF CHERA'S WAR AGAINST NORTH

Senguttuvan hearing the laudable life of Kannagi, decided to deify her and raise a temple in honour of this Goddess of Chastity (Kannagi). He declared that a stone from the Himalayas should be brought to fashion her image. If any monarch refused to give the stone he would be met in the battle-field. He further wanted that this declaration should be conveyed to the rulers of the North. But Azumbilvel, a Minister said since the spies of all countries are roaming about in the capital city itself it is suffice that the king's proclamation is tom-tomed in Vanji alone.

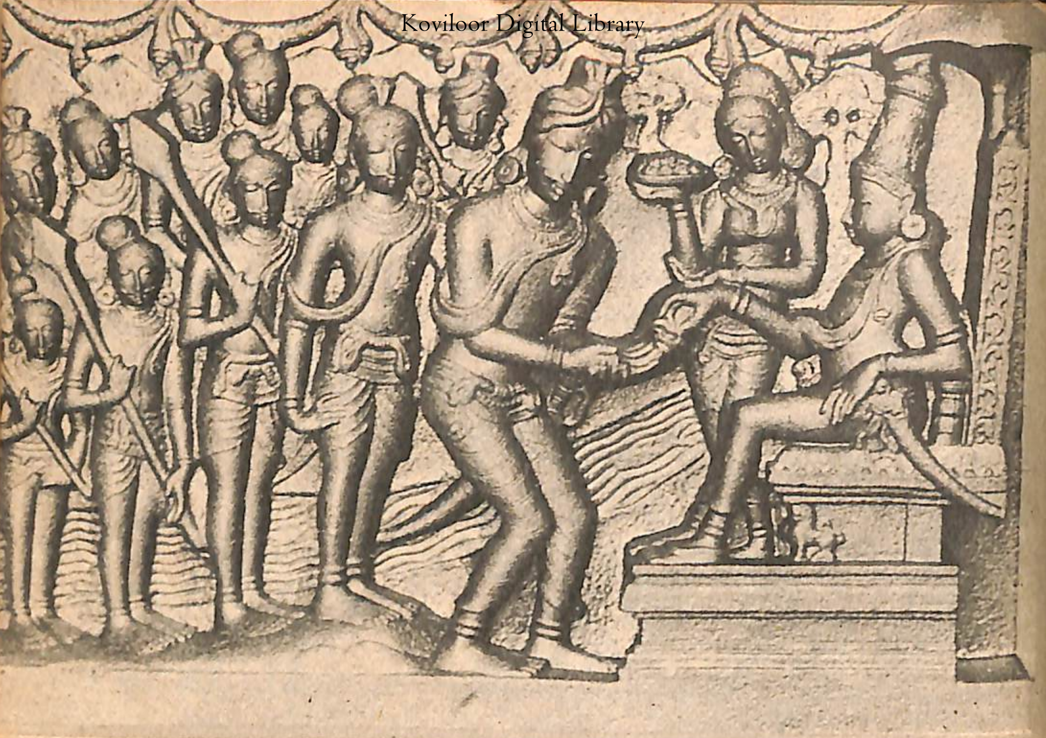
Thereupon it was proclaimed thus " Our guardian monarch marches forth to procure a stone from the Himalayas and all ye who are kings of the northern countries, come forth to meet him with tributes " ; the wind echoed the proclamation of the king to all the four corners of the city.





45. STONE CARRIED BY KANAKA AND VIJAYA

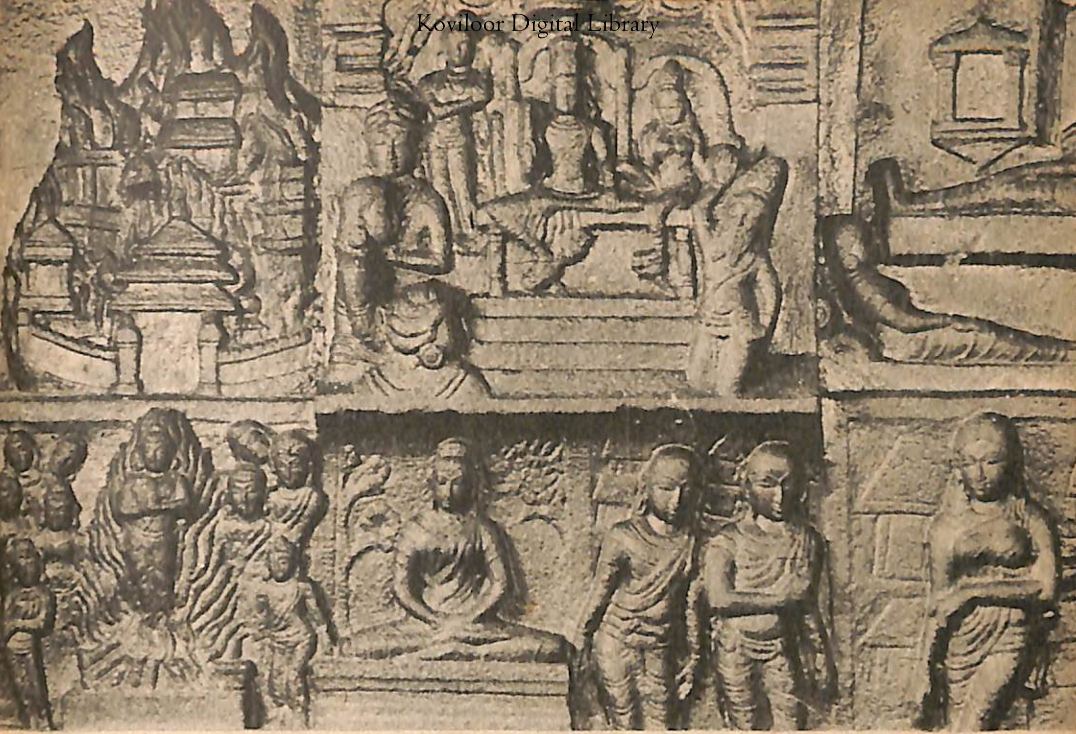
Senguttuvan was challenged in the battle field by a few Northern kings headed by Kanaka and Vijaya ; in the terrific battle ensued the enemies were unable to withstand the on-slaught of Senguttuvan's army and fled. But Kanaka and Vijaya were taken as captives. He commanded several differently armed units of his army to secure from the golden crested Himalayas a stone slab, which was placed on the resplendent crowns of Kanaka and Vijaya.



46. SENGUTTUVAN ON THE SOUTHERN BANK OF THE GANGES

Senguttuvan had the sacred stone immersed in the holy waters of the Ganges with all its religious rites of pomp and grandeur.

On the southern bank of the crystal-clear Ganges, the king seated himself in his tent created especially by his friendly as well as the vanquished kings of the north. The monarch rewarded all his soldiers with Vahai flowers made of gold.



47. MADALAN'S NARRATION TO CHERA

While Cheran Senguttuvan was seated on his throne the scholar Madalan arrived on the spot. He was greeted by the King and he remarked sarcastically that the seashore song of the lady Madhavi cracked the crowned heads of Kanaka and Vijaya. The Ruler asked him to explain the meaning of his enigmatic utterance. Then he narrated the episode happened at Puhar.

His record of narration signified the happenings at Puhar and the tribal folk's narration pertained to Vanji and the account of Sattanar portrayed the incidents in Madurai.

Cheran further learnt from Madalan that Madhavi entered the Buddha-Vihara and received holy instruction, the pre-requisites to become a Buddhist ascetic.



48. CHERAN'S TRIUMPHANT ENTRY TO HIS CAPITAL

The conches blew. Seated on the topmost point of swift state elephant, under the garlanded white umbrella, Senguttuvan with a Vahai wreath on his crown, entered Vanji, welcomed by its hilarious citizens in a procession of carts drawn by elephants. Thereon entered his capital with a triumphant smile fitted with pride and glory.



49. SENGUTTUVAN BUILT TEMPLE TO KANNAGI

To that venerable lady, a shrine constructed in accordance with prescribed rules, was dedicated.

In the solemn ceremony of consecration, Senguttuvan stood proffering his respect and in front of him, the Arya Kings releasd from prison, the Kongu Ruler, the King of Malava and Kayavagu, the Ruler of Ceylon prayed to the deity thus : "Please grace our countries by your presence on the eve of the sacrificial rites performed in honour of Imayavaramban on his birthday just as you have done on this auspicious day."



KING KARIKAL CHOLA

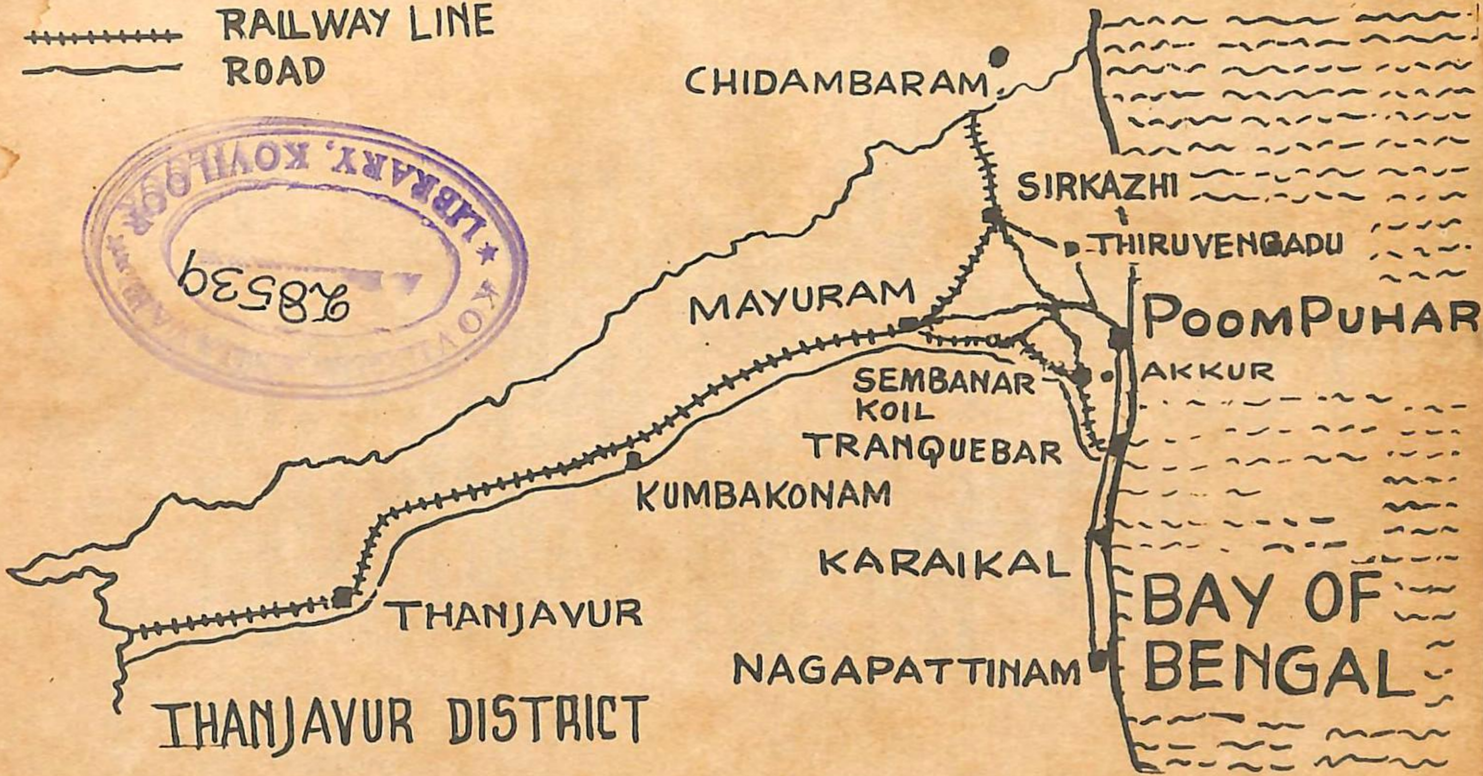
SOME HINTS TO THE TOURISTS VISITING POOM PUHAR

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Those from the southern districts of Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram and Madurai can reach Poompuhar by car via Melur, Tirupathur, Karaikudi, Pattukottai, Thiruduraipundi, Nagapattinam, Karikal, Tranquebar and Ackoor. Poompuhar can also be reached via Melur, Pudukottai, Thanjavur and Mayuram.

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